

CIA Morale Overseas Plummets

By Michael Getler

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BONN, Jan. 16—The mushrooming publication of names of U.S. Central Intelligence Agency employees serving abroad has caused a marked decline in the already low morale of agency personnel overseas.

Western intelligence officials in several overseas locations, most of whom were still trying to stiff-upper-lip the CIA's public image problems just a few months ago, now privately acknowledge that there has been a dramatic drop in morale in recent weeks that is not only affecting the agency's ability to gather intelligence but that is causing severe personal strain as well.

"It's like Berlin right after the war," one veteran official said. "You suddenly start driving with one eye on the rear view mirror. The nervous tension slips back into your life and you bring all that home with you to the family at night."

Interviews in recent weeks with a number of officials close to the U.S. intelligence service indicated that the year-long expose of CIA wrong doing by Congress and the press had already created serious problems, not just in the office, but at home for an increasing number of agency workers.

The concern most often mentioned was about teenage children who now questioned how their father made a living and why, even if he wasn't a spy, did he work for the CIA.

That kind of problem, rarely discussed openly, has now been heightened for many families with the publication of names of CIA employees, most of whom are not spies, but who now feel the threat that an assassin or terrorist could strike haphazardly at their family.

Under different circumstances, the publication of employee names or addresses would be viewed with concern but not alarm, sources say. It has, in fact, happened before in some countries.

But the murder of CIA

station chief Richard Welch outside his home in Athens on Christmas Eve "has given rather dramatic proportions to this thing. Publishing names is a very, very bad thing to be doing now. It's becoming fashionable and it's going to generate another murder," one senior official said.

The expectation that more murders will follow is widely shared by other intelligence officers.

"Nobody's panicked," said another veteran officer, "but the thing is gnawing away at us. The impact is beginning to show. The congressional review, the whole hoopla for more than a year now, was having a wearing-down effect. Now, rightly or wrongly, there is the new element of danger due to Welch and the publishing of names. There has been a quantum increase in depression and concern and nobody seems able to help or to stop what is undoubtedly ruining our ability to gather intelligence."

Another source said, "It's like they are using the (congressional) assassination report almost as a backdrop to the attempts against us. The agency has really been shattered. We are going to need a lot of forthright executive support to recover."

Where the CIA's most recent troubles will lead, in terms of its ability to operate overseas, is in doubt. Some officers feel that the widespread disclosure of employee identities will almost certainly serve to drive the agency underground.

"One can only stop it by doing a better job of hiding CIA personnel," says one officer.

The job of providing and keeping up a good cover, or hidden identity, however, takes an enormous amount of time, several sources say. This takes away from the time an agent can spend gathering intelligence and would weaken

Many of the employees are to their count the world acknowledge. Who in the CIA 1968 in East compiled by intelligence identifiers well be rash of disclosures.

But chances are that new officers coming into the field will be given much better cover, it is felt, which will not allow them to be picked so easily out of State Department registers or embassy telephone books.

If there are other murders, some sources feel, people will leave the agency, as some reportedly already are on the brink of doing. But others feel there will be a protective conservative backlash, not only in the United States but even in Western countries where there is little sympathy at the moment for the CIA.

Although many individual disclosures over the past year of CIA domestic surveillance and assassination plotting have been more startling, the impact of the Welch murder and publication of hundreds of names, primarily by leftist publications, seem to be the straw that is breaking the back of CIA morale in the field.

In France and England, where more than 70 CIA names have been disclosed in

each country, there is little danger felt by CIA people.

The problem is much more serious in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy. There are strong anti-American feelings afoot in these areas and political assassination is viewed as possible.

A similar fear exists here in West Germany, where no alleged CIA names have been published but where a troublesome but small band of terrorists operates.

agents in France published thus far by the leftist magazine Liberation.

There is concern in several U.S. embassies that in the rush to publish, legitimate diplomatic corps employees are being wrongly identified as CIA agents. There is also frustration at what is viewed as a public failure to understand that only a relatively small percentage of CIA employees are engaged in spying while most serve as analysts or liaison men with allied intelligence services.

Some serious pessimism is surfacing about the future, at least among some intelligence veterans.

One senior officer explained: "There is obviously some cold warrior in us because most of us still believe that the objective of the Soviet Union has not changed in 30 years and that objective is to get the United States out of Europe. Right now, they are getting some help."

"It has surely put a crimp in the elan, the willingness of officers to meet and take advantage of an opportunity at any hour or place. A lot of us have dealt with defectors and even saved some people's lives, and it's been done with the conviction that the information helped maintain the vitality of the Western alliance.

"Now," he went on, "that commitment appears to have worn away, everything the West does is corrupt and wrong in the press. What is that huge Soviet army in East Germany going to do? That's a legitimate question that even the left-wing journalists blowing these names would